

Application No: 13/1622M

Location: KNUTSFORD HIGH SCHOOL, BEXTON ROAD, KNUTSFORD, CHESHIRE, WA16 0EA

Proposal: Extensions to provide Dining Room / Entrance facilities and Studio School

Applicant: Andrew Lynes, Facilities Manager, Knutsford Academy

Expiry Date: 18-Jul-2013

Date Report Prepared: 17 June 2013

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION:

Approve, subject to conditions and referral to the Secretary of State

MAIN ISSUES:

- The principle of the development (*Green Belt*);
- Need;
- Impact on Recreational Open Space and Openness of the Green Belt;
- Design of the new build and impact on the character and appearance of the area;
- Landscape Implications;
- Residential Amenity;
- Highways access, service and parking issues; and
- Other Materials Planning Considerations.

REASON FOR REPORT

This application proposes the creation of over 1,000 square metres of floorspace therefore under the Council's Constitution is required to be determined by the Northern Planning Committee.

Subject to the recommended conditions, the proposal is considered to be acceptable for the reasons set out in the appraisal section of this report.

Members need to be aware that this application will have to be referred to the Secretary of State if the Council is minded to approve as the scheme would provide over 1,000 square metres of floor space in the Green Belt.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

Knutsford Academy is sited on land to the northwest of Bexton Road, Knutsford within the designated greenbelt where it has been since its creation as a County Secondary School in the late 1950's.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

Knutsford Academy was created in 2012 and now has approximately 1,247 pupils including a sixth form of 201. Originally designed and built for much smaller numbers, the school's basic support facilities such as dining room cannot cope with the current demand.

This application therefore seeks planning permission for the erection of extensions to provide Dining Room / Entrance facilities and Studio School for the Academy.

Dining Room / Entrance facilities:

The school has stated that their current dining facilities are very small and this leads to practical issues of feeding the students within the lunchtime available. A proposal to extend the dining area has been prepared which will include an improved main entrance and resolve accessibility issues of the current dining facility that can only be accessed via steps.

Studio School:

Knutsford Academy is actively seeking to improve its accommodation and provide educational facilities to meet the needs and aspirations of its students. Current educational thinking in providing secondary education in a manner linking academic and vocational qualifications in a different environment is leading to a number of Studio Schools being set up under Department For Education (DFE) initiatives.

Studio Schools offer academic and vocational qualifications, but teach them in a practical and project-based way. Study is combined with work placements with local and national employers who are involved in the school. Learning in this way encourages students to develop skills like punctuality, good communication, reliability and team working, whilst gaining a strong grounding in English, maths and science.

These new schools, which are set up with the backing of local businesses and employers, are part of the Government's drive to ensure the education system responds to demands from employers for the skills they need to grow and prosper. Employers say that ensuring our young people have these important skills should be a top education priority for the Government.

It should be emphasised that the proposed extension in area is not to facilitate an increase in numbers of pupils or staff above those currently using the site.

RELEVANT HISTORY

Although the school has been subject to some minor or historic planning permission(s), these are not relevant to this current proposal.

POLICIES

By virtue of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the application should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan for Cheshire East currently comprises saved policies from the Congleton Borough (January 2005), Crewe and Nantwich (February 2005) and Macclesfield Local Plan (January 2004).

North West of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021:

Please note that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has revoked the North West Regional Strategy on the 20 May 2013. Therefore this document no longer forms part of the Development Plan.

Local Plan Policy:

This school is identified within an existing Open Space in the Green Belt in Knutsford, therefore, the relevant Macclesfield Local Plan Policies are considered to be: -

Policy GC1: Development in the Green Belt;

Policy RT1: Protection of recreation open space;

Policy BE1: Design principles for new developments;

Policy DC1: High quality design for new build;

Policy DC3: Protection of the amenities of nearby residential properties; and

Policy DC6: Circulation & access.

Other Material Considerations:

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK:

The National Planning Policy Framework came into effect on 27 March 2012, and replaces the advice provided in Planning Policy Guidance Notes and Statements. The aim of this document is to make the planning system less complex and more accessible, to protect the environment and to promote sustainable growth. Local planning authorities are expected to “plan positively” and that there should be a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Since the NPPF was published, the saved policies within the Macclesfield Borough Council Local Plan are still applicable but should be weighted according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF. The Local Plan policies outlined above are consistent with the NPPF and therefore should be given full weight.

POLICY STATEMENT – PLANNING FOR SCHOOLS DEVELOPMENT:

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles) and the Secretary of State for Education (Mr Michael Gove) set out the Government's commitment to support the development of state-funded schools and their delivery through the planning system in this policy statement dated August 2011. It states that the planning system should operate in a positive manner when dealing with proposals for the creation, expansion and

alteration of state-funded schools, and that the following principles should apply with immediate effect:

- There should be a presumption in favour of the development of state-funded schools, as expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework;
- Local authorities should give full and thorough consideration to the importance of enabling the development of state-funded schools in their planning decisions;
- Local authorities should make full use of their planning powers to support state-funded schools applications;
- Local authorities should only impose conditions that clearly and demonstrably meet the tests set out in Circular 11/95;
- Local authorities should ensure that the process for submitting and determining state-funded schools' applications is as streamlined as possible;
- A refusal of any application for a state-funded school, or the imposition of conditions, will have to be clearly justified by the local planning authority;
- Appeals against any refusals of planning permission for state-funded schools should be treated as a priority; and
- Where a local planning authority refuses planning permission for a state-funded school, the Secretary of State will consider carefully whether to recover for his own determination appeals against the refusal of planning permission.

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Sport England: No objections.

Highways: No objections.

Environmental Health: No objections, subject to conditions regarding hours of constructions, method statement if pile foundations and/or concrete floors are used in construction.

Public Rights of Way: No objection as the development does not appear to affect a public right of way.

VIEWS OF THE PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL

Knutsford Town Council: No objections but expect that neighbours views be sought concerning the overlooking windows. Any concerns about this could be alleviated by the use of an opaque/frosted glass condition.

REPRESENTATIONS

The application has been duly advertised on site by the means of a site notice and neighbouring properties have been written to directly, notice was also published in the local press.

23 letters of objection have been received from local residents and their objections can be summarised as follows: -

- The proposed extension to the dining facilities requires the loss of parking spaces in the existing school car park;
- The proposed new block will be bound to increase overall capacity of the school;

- Parking is already a huge issue on this side of Knutsford with three schools in the vicinity;
- Concerns over impact on infrastructure of this part of the town;
- Concerned with the height of the structure and its proximity to the rear houses on Cranford Avenue;
- Concerned with the impact to sunlight and views from properties on Cranford Avenue;
- Concerned with changes to the dynamics of noise attenuation the generation of noise when the studio is used outside of normal school hours;
- Loss of privacy to residential properties on Cranford Avenue;
- The design of the new building is not in keeping with the current buildings;
- Lack of landscaping;
- Traffic management arrangement is put in place to stop construction traffic accessing; and
- Additional car parking is provided in the school grounds to replace the existing car parking that is unusable during construction, and to accommodate the cars of construction workers and other construction vehicles and plant.

APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The applicant has submitted a *Design & Access Statement*, details of which can be read on file.

OFFICER APPRAISAL

The principle of the development (*Green Belt*):

This school site is within defined Green Belt. National Planning Policy Framework and GC1 of the Macclesfield Local Plan limit the forms of new buildings permitted with the Green Belt. Within the Green Belt approval will not be given, except in very special circumstances, for the construction of new buildings unless it is for a number of purposes. Education facilities are not listed as one of those purposes.

Paragraph 89 of the NPPF states that the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. It goes on to list exceptions to this and one of these (*bullet point three*) is: -

The extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

The phrase 'disproportionate additions' cannot be clearly defined, as much will depend upon the circumstances of each case. However, a proposal will be considered to be 'disproportionate' if the development would result in an increase of more than 30% of the original dwelling. This is consistent with the Council's Policy (GC12) for residential dwellings in the Green Belt.

Although the current proposal is for an extension and a large new build with a floor area of 1,510sm, the school as a whole has a floor area of 14,677sm. Therefore the scheme would only equate to a 2% increase on floor space of the school as a whole.

Need:

The Government is firmly committed to ensuring there is sufficient provision to meet growing demand for state-funded school places, increasing choice and opportunity in state funded education and raising educational standards. State funded schools (which include Academies) educate the vast majority of children in England. The Government wants to enable new schools to open, good schools to expand and all schools to adapt and improve their facilities. This will allow for more provision and greater diversity in the state-funded school sector to meet both demographic needs and the drive for increased choice and higher standards.

It is the Government's view that the creation and development of state-funded schools is strongly in the national interest and that planning decision-makers can and should support that objective, in a manner consistent with their statutory obligations. We expect all parties to work together proactively from an early stage to help plan for state-school development and to shape strong planning applications. This collaborative working would help to ensure that the answer to proposals for the development of state-funded schools should be, wherever possible, "yes".

It is considered that the need for the school to provide the proposed additional facilities has been fully established above, and without them Knutsford Academy will be unable to offer properly resourced social, teaching and learning facilities to its pupils.

Impact on Recreational Open Space and Openness of the Green Belt:

As the school site is also allocated as Open Space, one of the key policies is policy RT1, which seeks to protect recreational open space from development. Policy RT1 does allow for development if the proposed is to provide an additional educational building and the integrity of the open space is not harmed.

Due to the character of the studio school accommodation with larger spaces capable of replicating a workplace environment, and the need for it to create a distinct ethos a separate self contained block is proposed. A location on the current hard surfaced area adjacent to the leisure centre sport hall has been identified as close enough to the school's main circulation routes, and will have little visual impact as it is surrounded on three sides by existing buildings. The dining and entrance extensions are located so as to be contiguous with the existing facilities for obvious reasons.

In this instance, it is considered that the proposed extensions and alterations do not threaten the integrity of the open space. All of what is proposed is sited existing tarmac areas and therefore there is no loss of grassed open space.

It is considered that the proposed extensions will have an effect on the openness and visual amenity of the Green belt. However, this is considered acceptable as the extension and new built elements are set against the existing school buildings away from the open Green Belt area.

Design of the new build and impact on the character and appearance of the area:

The proposed new studio building is a separate block, located on an area of hard standing adjacent to the leisure centre. The new buildings are commensurate with the existing

buildings in height and massing and being set against the existing will have little visual impact.

The proposal uses facing brickwork, metal roofing, and curtain walling already present on the site, with the mass of the studio school block articulated with a contrasting dark blue clay block, and projecting staircase bays. The dining and entrance extension uses a curved projecting metal roof and curtain walling to create an interesting and up to date frontage as the main approach to the school.

The size, scale, design, materials and siting of the proposed extensions and alterations are considered to be in keeping with the existing buildings on site and. As such, the proposals would not harm the character or appearance of the area and have an acceptable relationship with the street-scene.

Landscape Implications:

There will be some tree loss associated with the new dining extension, which will be located in an existing car parking area accessed from Bexton Road. However, it is considered that any tree loss will be mitigated with new additional planting, which is proposed along the Bexton Road frontage. Detailed landscape conditions are proposed to secure the detailed planting proposals required.

The proposed new building for the studio school will approximately follow the existing alignment of school buildings and the leisure centre and is also of a similar height. However the boundary planting between the leisure centre and properties along Cranford Avenue is more substantial than that which exists further to the south. Consequently it is not considered that the new building would have a visual impact on a number of properties situated along Cranford Avenue.

Residential Amenity:

The nearest residential properties to the new studio school are on Cranford Avenue, whilst the nearest properties facing the school opposite the new entrance are on Bexton Road.

The new studio school building is located 21.5 metres away from the nearest boundary and is 28 metres away from the rear elevations of the properties facing Cranford Avenue. The new building has been design so that the majority of the classroom windows look within the site. It is considered that the new proposals will not significantly alter the relationships between existing school buildings/ and neighbouring properties. Therefore, the proposals are considered to have a very limited and acceptable degree of impact on the amenities of neighbouring residential properties.

It is considered that the proposed new entrance extension will have no impact on the residential amenity of the properties on Bexton Road. Although the extension is less than 10 metres from the school boundary, there is boundary screening and the properties are on the opposite side of the road.

The whole application site is in close proximity to existing residential properties and whilst other legislation exists to restrict the noise impact from construction and demolition activities,

this is not adequate to control all construction noise, which may have a detrimental impact on residential amenity in the area. Therefore a condition is suggested to control hours of demolition and construction works in the interest of residential amenity.

Although a condition has been suggested by the Council's Environmental Health Section in the event that piled foundations are necessary and if concrete floor are floated, this is considered to be unnecessary as the hours of construction would be controlled via the condition above.

Highways access, service and parking issues:

It is proposed to extend the dining room, improve entrance facilities and construct a new studio school, the dining extension is located on the existing car park and the car parking spaces lost are to be replaced.

The access to the site is unchanged by the proposals, although the car park to the front of the building has been remodelled to replace the lost car parking spaces.

As there is no practical increase in the school capacity proposed in the application, there are no highway issues raised by the proposed development and no objections are raised.

Other Materials Planning Considerations:

There is no compelling objection to the application proposal in highways or infrastructure terms. Whilst understanding local views, the site is an existing school in a sustainable location. It is accepted that the objective of reaching the right balance between development and provision for infrastructure in Knutsford might need to be further considered as a strategic planning matter in the context of the Council's emerging Core Strategy and any subsequent Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) or other DPD.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

Extensions to schools are not listed in the exception categories to inappropriate development in the Green Belt set out in the NPPF or Local plan policy GC1. Buildings in the Green Belt may be extended so long as the extensions are not disproportionate to the original building. In this case the original building has/would not be extended by more than a "proportionate" amount. The proposal is therefore not inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

The development is set against the existing built form and therefore is acceptable in landscape and visual terms. However, an extension of this size does have an impact on openness of the Green Belt which adds to the harm to the green belt. To justify a grant of planning permission, other consideration must exist which *clearly outweigh* the identified harm to the Green Belt.

The government has issued very strong guidance supporting the development of state funded schools and academies. This is a material consideration which should be afforded significant weight in the consideration of this application. The applicant has demonstrated a clear need for the accommodation to improve the functioning of the school in a way that minimises the

visual impact on the Green Belt. It is considered that other considerations do exist which clearly outweigh the harm to green belt by loss of openness.

Objections to the scheme have been fully considered. However, subject to conditions, the proposal complies with all other relevant policies of the Development Plan and the Framework.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to following conditions

1. A03FP - Commencement of development (3 years)
2. A01AP - Development in accord with approved plans
3. A06EX - Materials as application
4. A22GR - Protection from noise during construction (hours of construction)
5. A01LS - Landscaping - submission of details
6. AD01 - Complies with development plan
7. AD14 - Acceptable relationship adjacent and wider
8. AD15 - Acceptable impact on amenity
9. POL01 - Policies
10. Pile foundations
11. NPPF



